



# City of Cambridge Department of Public Works

Owen O'Riordan, Commissioner

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Dear Cambridge Retail Establishment:

The Bring Your Own Bag (BYOB) ordinance, passed by Cambridge City Council on March 30, 2015, goes into effect **March 31, 2016**. The purpose of the Ordinance is to protect the marine environment, advance solid waste reduction, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and protect waterways by reducing disposable checkout bags at retail establishments. The Ordinance seeks to reduce the number of plastic and paper bags being burned, used, discarded and littered, and to promote the use of reusable checkout bags.

The purpose of the ordinance is to encourage the use of reusable bags. The ordinance prohibits single-use plastic bags with handles at the point of sale. Furthermore, a charge on all checkout bags with handles (paper, compostable or reusable) at retail stores is mandatory. The minimum charge per bag is \$0.10, but retail establishments may decide to charge more. The charge must be itemized on the receipt and shall be identified as the "Checkout Bag Charge." Three exemptions are listed in the ordinance, including one that allows retail establishments to drawdown their plastic bag inventory. To review the ordinance and apply for an exemption, visit [CambridgeMA.Gov/BYOB](http://CambridgeMA.Gov/BYOB).

**Please place the enclosed sticker at your credit card terminal or other visible location at point of sale. If you need more stickers or a translated sticker, contact us. Please post the flyer included also.**

The City is hosting a few events for business owners to prepare for the ordinance going into effect:

1. BYOB Ordinance information session for restaurants: Tuesday February 16 2016, 9:30am at Main Library-- 449 Broadway
2. BYOB Ordinance information session for other retail establishments: Tuesday February 16 2016, 10:30am at Main Library-- 449 Broadway
3. Accounting/Sales Tax Office Hours: February 23, 3-5pm at 344 Broadway, 2nd floor Conference Room.



If you would like to attend either February 16 event, RSVP by calling or emailing Michael Orr (see below). If you would like to attend the Accounting/Sales Tax Office Hours, please contact Pardis Saffari at [psaffari@cambridgema.gov](mailto:psaffari@cambridgema.gov) or 617.349.4654. Pardis may sign you up for a monthly e-newsletter from Cambridge's Economic Development Division on important information and programs for businesses.

For updates on the ordinance, FAQs, and exemptions please visit [CambridgeMA.Gov/BYOB](http://CambridgeMA.Gov/BYOB) regularly. You may contact Michael Orr, Waste Reduction Program Manager at [morr@cambridgema.gov](mailto:morr@cambridgema.gov) or 617.349.4815.

Sincerely,

Owen O'Riordan  
Department of Public Works Commissioner



## BYOB Ordinance FAQs:

**1. Abbreviated definitions of bags. For full definition, visit the website:**

- a. Reusable bag**—a bag with handles for multiple reuse and, if plastic at least 3.0 mils thickness.
- b. Recyclable Paper Bag**—100% recyclable and contains at least 40% post-consumer recycled content. The bag must display both. If your bag doesn't display both, please contact Michael Orr at Cambridge DPW.
- c. Compostable Bag**—must be BPI certified.

**2. Question:** Is the checkout bag charge taxable?

**Answer:** Yes, the checkout bag charge is subject to sales tax. If you need help understanding sales tax collection and reporting, consider attending the Accounting/Sales Tax Office Hours on February 23, 2016.

**3. Question:** What's the plan for informing customers of the ordinance?

**Answer:** The City is doing outreach via social media, news outlets, and billboards in Cambridge. But, a lot of the outreach must be done in retail establishments. To assist with that, we provided checkout stickers and flyers. Cashiers should ask: "Did you bring a reusable bag, or would you like a bag for \$0.10 each plus tax?" This is a best practice in other cities with bag ordinances. The statement will remind customers to bring reusable bags and avoid any confusion about the cost of bags.

**4. Question:** May we offer a discount to customers bringing their own reusable bag?

**Answer:** Yes! In fact, we strongly encourage this to further incentivize waste reduction.

**5. Question:** What if my paper bag doesn't have handles?

**Answer:** The spirit of the law is to help change the consumption habits of consumers. Therefore, we strongly encourage retailers to ask customers if they absolutely need a bag regardless of whether the bag falls under the ordinance or not. If there aren't handles the bag does not fall under the ordinance.

**6. Question:** I own a restaurant/food establishment; does this ordinance apply to me?

**Answer:** Yes, if your business provides bags with handles at checkout. If a restaurant provides a bag with handles for take-out, delivery, or food to-go from an in-house meal there must be a charge for the bag.

**7. Question:** What if my paper bags don't display the proper information?

**Answer:** Contact your supplier to ask for "legislatively compliant bags." Be sure the correct information is displayed on the bag. If you are unable to get bags that display the correct info, please contact DPW.

**8. Question:** What if there is no reasonable alternative to the bags I provide currently?

**Answer:** You may apply for an exemption, which is available online.